

# IGNITION

VELIBOR BOŽOVIĆ

MARIE-PIER BRETON

CHUN HUA CATHERINE DONG

JOANNE JOE YAN HUI

JENNA DAWN MACLELLAN

WREN NOBLE

JAMES WHITMAN

with BARRY DOUPÉ

50



MAY 18 – JUNE 16, 2012



Wren Noble. *Madame, Monsieur*, 2011



## WAYS OF THINKING

*Ways of Thinking* is designed for anyone interested in exploring contemporary art and its exhibition framework. It offers succinct and synthesized information on the exhibition's concept, the artists and the works featured. For the complete version of *Ways of Thinking* that includes bibliographic references, please visit our website: [www.ellengallery.concordia.ca/2006/en/](http://www.ellengallery.concordia.ca/2006/en/)

**IGNITION** is an annual, curated exhibition recent work by students in Concordia University's graduate Studio Arts program, and, for the first time, the Humanities doctoral program. It provides an up-and-coming generation of artists with a unique opportunity to present ambitious, interdisciplinary works in the professional context of a gallery with a national and international profile. Students work directly with Gallery staff to produce an exhibition that places an emphasis on critical, innovative, and experimental work engaging in an exploration and consideration of diverse media and practices. This year **IGNITION** features artists who engage with questions and narratives that are of social, cultural, and/or political relevance in artworks that often bridge documentary and fiction, the personal and the relational, performance and embodied experience.

The work featured in this edition of **IGNITION** was selected by the independent curator Véronique Leblanc and Michèle Thériault, Director of the Ellen Art Gallery.



Inspired by her time spent with senior citizens in rural Quebec, **Marie-Pier Breton** collaborates with members of this community in the creation of narratives that centre on aging, death, and the passing of time. The highly cinematic video *in limbo* uses the image of a man and a woman on a dance floor as a poetic reflection on these universal themes. More in the documentary vein, **Wren Noble**'s photographic series *Madame, Monsieur* portrays an elderly couple who, over time, as their respective physical and mental faculties diminish, dress in matching, colorful clothing. These vivid portraits function as a celebration of old age while destabilizing traditional expectations around gender performativity and old age. With reference to the Bosnian War of the 1990s, **Velibor Božović**'s video installation *My Prisoner* is a haunting exploration of memory. Combining elements of autobiography and documentary, Božović's profoundly philosophical project grapples with memory's malleability, raising questions about how we remember the past and if we can know what is real?

In her performance-based work *The Husbands and I*, **Chun Hua Catherine Dong** documents time spent with dozens of white Canadian men within domestic and public spaces. Making the viewer complicit in the role of voyeur, Dong boldly overturns exoticising fantasies of the "submissive" Asian female as well as politically correct notions of multiculturalism, tolerance, and belonging. **Joanne Joe Yan Hui**'s *EXPO DAILY* delves into the Shanghai World Exposition of 2010 as a vector for official conceptions of nationalism in juxtaposition with more fluidly subjective, autobiographical expressions of transnational identity. In this part playful, part pedagogical series of drawings and texts, Hui nimbly mixes references to ethnographic research practices, travelogue traditions, and journalism. **jenna dawn maclellan**'s *a study in greyscale* is the result of a recent visit to Cuba where she invited Cubans to consider their relationship to globalisation while being photographed with a pinhole camera. These blurred portraits suggest an open-ended ambiguity, one that reflects Cuba's position within the global market place as much as the diversity of answers that the artist received.

**James Whitman** collaborates with **Barry Doupé** on *Adorno and Nose*, a musical body of work featuring several songs as well as sheet music, lyrics, and drawings. This project is a tribute to their joint creative process, one that encourages back-and-forth strategies of play, flexibility, digression, and humour.

VELIBOR BOŽOVIĆ

**My Prisoner, 2012**  
*My Prisoner*, video, 6 min. 29 sec.  
*Search*, video, 7 min. 52 sec.  
Text

I explore how images influence memory through the role they play when the historical, the fictional, and the personal combine to affect and transform each other. I am interested both in the absence that photographs imply and in photographs as a home for the worlds we have lost.

*My Prisoner* is an investigation of the records and memories I have retained of a specific episode in my life. In 1994, I served in the Bosnian army to defend the besieged city of Sarajevo while at the same time my father was in a Bosnian army prisoner of war camp. The army decided both of our fates: my father was its prisoner and I was its soldier. In *My Prisoner* I explore the archival footage of our only meeting during the war. The footage is simultaneously propaganda, a historical

document, and a record of my personal experience. It is impossible to say where one stops and the other begins.

- EXPLORE
- the elements that comprise *My Prisoner* and consider how they function together to create this multifaceted work;
  - the roles that war and memory play in *My Prisoner*.

MARIE-PIER BRETON

**in limbo, 2011**  
Video, 4 min. 10 sec.

Through large-scale video installations and experimental films rooted in the new documentary approach, my current work focuses on the relationship elderly people have to their physical appearance, its maintenance, and beauty rituals. By creating meditative atmospheres where daily routines and activities are examined, I create narratives that reveal the vulnerability of subjects who are coping with the loss of their identity.

After visiting a community of elderly people in a rural Québec town every week for a period of about six months, I started creating narratives inspired by the lives of the people I encountered. Using them as actors, I made a short experimental film entitled *in limbo*. Set between reality and fiction, the film documents the movements of an elderly couple as they perform their very last dance. The original score was made using ambient sounds recorded in the dance hall where the couple is dancing. *in limbo* explores nostalgia, death, and mourning.

- EXPLORE
- the ways in which this work straddles reality and fiction;
  - sound and how it contributes to *in limbo*.

CHUN HUA CATHERINE DONG

**The Husbands and I, 2009–2011**  
Performance, video, digital prints, photo albums, curtains, bed, side tables, lamps.

Life itself is a performance. I consider performance to be an attitude rather than a medium, an ideology rather than a style, and a situation rather than an action. In keeping with my interests in identity politics and postmodern feminism, I utilize my own body to explore ruptures in society. My performances deal primarily with deterritorialization and disessentialization by examining my personal and multifaceted struggles associated with identity, gender and sexuality.

My physical encounters with white males represent an ideological confrontation between me and a Western sociopolitical landscape to which I feel I don't belong. By exploring these intimate encounters, I try to both reconfigure the established power that privileged white males embody, and question whether or not the culturally identified Chinese female body, both as foreign subject and object, can be invested and exploited.

- EXPLORE
- the questions that this work raises about identity;
  - the role that performance plays here in both forming and questioning identity.

JOANNE JOE YAN HUI

**EXPO DAILY, 2012**  
Drawings, posters, digital print.

My creative practice finds visual forms that complicate the popular and historic

representations of culturally diverse communities, often pointing to fluid conditions of subjective experience and cultural production; hybridity, diaspora, and transnationalism are key terms to describe this condition. More specifically, I use print media and comic art to draw Chinese-Canadian historic moments of activism alongside a visual journal of current transnational communities in Canada and China.

I spent two months in Shanghai performing ethnographic fieldwork at the 2010 World Exposition hosted by the city. Since my return, I have developed my initial material by blending fact (news cuttings) with ethnographic observation, literary theory, and memoir writing to create a graphic travelogue of the 2010 World Exposition in Shanghai. Very often, comical and pedagogical accounts are the result.

- EXPLORE
- the idea of the travelogue and the ways in which it is realized through this work;
  - the nature of the information that is communicated here via image and text.

JENNA DAWN MACLELLAN

**a study in greyscale, 2012**  
Pinhole camera with four lenses, three colour cards, digital audio recording, six black and white pinhole portraits (printed as digital c-prints).

jenna dawn maclellan seeks to set up and explore sites of exchange through performative, site-specific interventions aimed at giving, sharing and returning. Each of her works is intended as a gesture and an exercise in presence. This socially invested practice builds on simple technologies with appropriate materials to approach and reveal complex social narratives. With the desire to enable the impossible to become possible, she becomes the amateur, each time learning a new role and skill.

My current work attempts to grasp the concept of global trade and its effects locally, through imports and exports, with particular attention given to Cuba's current transitional state. Reflecting on the artist Martha Wilson's comment, "We are living in a grey period,"\* I attempt to understand the greyness surrounding globalization by seeking alternative means of exchange through public engagement.

\*During her seminar Performance and Identity at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery in January 2012, Martha Wilson was asked what an engaged artist should concentrate on today. Wilson replied that the answer was not clear, stating, "We are living in a grey period." This statement reflects my recent work exploring this grey zone and how it applies to global exchange.

- EXPLORE
- the kinds of questions that this work asks about exchange and trade in Cuba;
  - working processes and the relationship that exists between artist and participants in this work.

WREN NOBLE

**Madame, Monsieur, 2011**  
13 ink-jet prints.

My practice in both film and photography consists of environmental portraits that are often personal and intimate. Much of my work revolves around concepts of ageing and identity, and my own anxieties therein. Not quite documentary, my portraits are taken from within my subjective vision of the individuals and my relationship to them.

These images make visually manifest the increasing co-dependency and blurring of boundaries between individuals involved in intimate relationships into old age. They are a study in eccentricity and public presentation. They are also the result

of my fruitful collaboration with these two individuals. Our interactions are an exchange of display and recognition. They allow me into the intimacy of their two-person routine as an observer and I give them a private audience in return.

EXPLORE

- the boundaries between observation and intimacy;
- representations of gender, identity, and age in *Madame, Monsieur*.

JAMES WHITMAN with BARRY DOUPÉ

**Adorno and Nose, 2011**  
Performance, sheet music for ten compositions for solo voice, lyrics, drawings.

We develop forms for long-term, open-ended, collaborative practice. These collaborations have the potential to develop considerably over time, and can last for years. We work to put things in motion, to preserve their fluidity and keep them unsettled. Everything can be deflated, can have its terms reversed and become its opposite. Anything is subject to a pratfall, to becoming small and harmless.

Our interest is in the kinds of specific attention that happen when music is lifted out of the economies within which it is normally experienced.

- EXPLORE
- the nature of collaboration;
  - tone and the role of performance in completing these works.



## **Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery**

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